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The first publication in the Viewpoint Series of the Center for the Book, this booklet contains the first lecture commemorating Luise Sillcox. The booklet includes a preface by John Y. Cole, Executive Director of the Center for the Book, and an introduction by John Hersey, President of the Authors League of America. The lecture presented in the booklet, given by Barbara Tuchman, focuses on the history of the book from its beginnings on clay tablets and papyrus written by scribes and priests; follows its development up to the present time; mentions some of the greatest books written in the Western world, as well as some of its greatest authors; and discusses early libraries, the pleasure gained from reading books, popular books and authors from different historical periods, the changing public taste, books with great political influence, paperback books, and the advent of television. (EL)

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THE BOOK

A LECTURE SPONSORED BY THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK
IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
AND THE
AUTHORS LEAGUE OF AMERICA

PRESENTED AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
OCTOBER 17, 1979

by Barbara W. Tuchman

with an introduction by John Hersey

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PREFACE

THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK in the Library of Congress was established by an Act of Congress, Public Law 95-129, approved on October 13, 1977. Its purpose is to stimulate appreciation of the essential role of the book and the printed word — past, present, and future. Barbara Tuchman's splendid talk on "The Book" exemplifies one kind of center activity: sponsorship of public lectures about books, reading, and our society. We are pleased that it is the first publication in The Center for the Book Viewpoint Series, which will make a variety of presentations available to a wide audience.

It is important to develop and sustain the relationship between the Center for the Book and those who create books, for all parts of the book community — from authors to readers — must work together if we are to solve our common problems. This lecture gave the center the opportunity to collaborate with the Authors League of America in honoring the memory of Luise Sillcox, its longtime executive secretary. Other Center for the Book events recognizing authors and their contributions have included a reception for Chicago authors held in the Chicago Cultural Center during the 1978 annual meeting of the American Library Association and public lectures by two distinguished authors of children's books — Jill Paton Walsh and Elaine L. Konigsburg.

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress is a privately funded organization that is nourished by a remarkable public institution. Drawing on the resources of the Library, it works closely with many organizations to explore important issues, to encourage reading, and to encourage research. Its goal is to serve as a useful catalyst among authors, publishers, librarians, booksellers, educators, scholars, and *readers*. The 140 citizens on its 1979-80 National Advisory Board serve as channels between the center and their particular segments of the book and educational communities. They suggest projects, participate in programs, and provide advice about how we can dramatize the

importance of the book and the printed word. Contributions to the Center for the Book, which are tax deductible, are welcome.

Proposals for lectures, seminars, programs, and research projects are appreciated also. The interests of the Center for the Book include the educational and cultural role of the book; the history of books and printing; the future of the book, especially as it relates to new technologies and other media; the international flow of books; authorship and writing; the publishing, design, production, and preservation of books; the distribution, access, and use of books and printed materials; reading; literacy; and the institutions of the book world.

Volumes based on the first two seminars, *Television, the Book, and the Classroom* (1978) and *Reading in America 1978* (1979), are now available. Each may be purchased for $4.95, prepaid, from the Information Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540. Two brochures, *The Center for the Book: The Planning Year* (1978) and *The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress* (1979) are available without charge from the Center for the Book, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

John Y. Cole
Executive Director
The Center for the Book

INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHORS LEAGUE *is delighted to join the Center for the Book in sponsoring the first Sillcox Lecture, and we who are writers are especially happy that it should be delivered in this great treasure-house of literature and history.*

But why a Sillcox Lecture? What does the name Sillcox stand for?

For many years the late Luise Marie Sillcox—we don't know for sure how many years, but we think forty-nine, or perhaps it was a round fifty—was a presence in the office of the Authors League of America. She served the league and gave herself to the world of books and plays for half a century.

But for many of you who do not know the answer, perhaps I should ask: What is this league?

The Authors League is the professional organization of the writer in the United States. It has some eighty-five hundred members, and I dare say almost every author whose books you care to read, or whose plays you care to see, is a member. The league has two constituent guilds. One is the Authors Guild, which serves the concerns of novelists, poets, historians, essayists, critics, journalists, and so on—writers of books. The other guild is the Dramatists Guild, whose name defines the craft of its roster.

The parent body, the Authors League, has as its business the great issues that touch all writers and that affect all books and plays: copyright, freedom of speech, censorship, taxation, and other matters of law and thought that govern the written word. We had for nearly fifteen years a most cordial and, we believe, constructive association with one wing of the Library of Congress, its Copyright Office, in offering our views to it and to Congress during the long task of shaping the new Copyright Act that finally became law last year.

In her time with the league, Luise Sillcox became the memory, the spur, the conscience, the will, and the cheerful heart of this organization. Her story incidentally provides a

fascinating study in how a woman of ability was obliged to make her moves during the first half of this century.

At birth, two days before Christmas, in 1889, in New York City, Luise Sillcox weighed two and a quarter pounds. She spoke of having been "a teentsie thing"; and even when she had become a quite generously full-sized lady, she habitually represented herself, in her overmodesty, as small. Daughter of a sewing-machine salesman who later became a successful exporter of agricultural tools, she graduated from Barnard in 1911 and was soon offered a clerkship in a textbook publishing house, Silver Burdett.

But her father thought it not nice or proper for a young lady to go into trade. She once told me: "Daddy said I could go if I'd be good at it, but not otherwise. I told him that was absurd. How could I guarantee I'd be good? 'You just have to be,' he said, 'because you're carrying my name.'"

Finally, but reluctantly, he gave his permission, and Luise went to work for the publisher for three dollars a week. In 1912 the Authors League was founded, and about three years later it hired Miss Sillcox: I'm glad to say all trace of what we *paid her then has been lost. She was hired to lick stamps. Up to then, the author members of the executive committee had licked stamps, and they had had enough of that. The man who interviewed her for the job was an author by the name of Theodore Roosevelt. Luise chased about New York as a courier for a manuscript delivering service the league ran then and served as file clerk and bookkeeper. At a board meeting a director dropped a word about double-entry bookkeeping. "What's* that?*" Luise said. "I just put the figures here and put them there—and, well, they come out."*

"Think!" Teddy Roosevelt roared at her at another meeting. "Think, child! You have to walk to think. You can't think sitting in that armchair. On your feet, girl! Move about! Think!"

After the achievement of the Dramatists' Minimum Basic Agreement, one of the great accomplishments of her early years, she rode back to the office one day with Arthur Garfield Hayes, then the league's attorney. "We've got to find a secretary to run this thing," Hayes said.

"Secretary!" Luise said in one of her tones of voice, that of

the dainty uncertain slip she once had been. "What about me?"

"Oh, you'll work for him,*" Hayes said.*

Then suddenly out came Luise Sillcox's other voice, the one so many of us remember having heard in later years at moments when Luise's authors were threatened in any way. "Oh, I will, will *I?"*

Needless to say she, and not Hayes's him*, became the executive secretary of the league. She helped form the Screen Writers Guild and Radio Writers Guild, both of which, because they had become labor unions, separated from the league. With Sidney Howard, she hit upon the idea behind the Dramatists' Play Service, which handles amateur rights for many playwrights. In the late forties she worked with Richard Lockridge and Christopher LaFarge in negotiating a book contract with Random House which met many Authors Guild standards and paved the way for a later model contract devised by the guild for its members. With rare tact she managed the Authors League Fund, which lends money to authors who are in times of trouble, or sickness, or particular need, and have no collateral but their talent.*

These things may sound to anyone but a writer like humdrum matters, but the point about Luise Sillcox was that in these and her myriad other labors at the side of authors – authors like Rex Beach, Arthur Train, Alice Duer Miller, Sidney Howard, Oscar Hammerstein, Rex Stout, and many others – it was always the well-being of the writer as a person *that she cared about, not the professional technicality, not the fine contractual point for its own sake. For she understood that behind and in front of every book stand two mortals who need each other, the author and the reader; backstage and out front at every play two others, the playwright and the witness. It was whatever would affect the quality of the transactions between those pairs of partners that she cared about, and worked for.*

So it is that every writer in the country, whether a member of the Authors League or not, owes an indirect debt to Luise Sillcox. And since we are celebrating the book here tonight, one could say that she has left her small mark, even if it cannot be seen by the naked eye, a kind of invisible colophon, in every book published in recent decades in the United States.

How it would have thrilled Luise Sillcox to know that an author of the distinction of Barbara Tuchman would one evening speak in the Library of Congress in her honor! And how fitting this is.

We all know of the accomplishments of this remarkable historian. She has rightfully won many of the highest honors of her profession: the Pulitzer Prize, the Gold Medal for History of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and, recently, the presidency of that academy and institute; she is the first woman ever elected to that office. It honors the Authors League that she is a member of its governing body.

What is the quality that has won her not only these honors but also that greatest of all prizes a writer could have—that rare combination of the highest literary eminence and *an immense and devoted audience? What is the strange linkage between books as diverse in subject matter and theme as* The Guns of August, The Proud Tower, Stilwell and the American Experience in China, *and* A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century?

It is not simply her staggering industriousness and impeccable scholarship, impressive as they are. It is, I believe, the passion that lies behind her restless curiosity—the passionate insistence that life should have meaning and high value. A word we often hear from her is "civilization." She brings to bear the great civilizing gifts—intelligence, judgment, memory, humor, and a sharpness, too, a scathing tongue for nonsense—so that in reading her we learn something about living as civilized beings.

John Hersey

President
The Authors League of America

SILLCOX LECTURE at the
Library of Congress, October 17, 1979

THE BOOK

TO COMMEMORATE LUISE SILLCOX, who did so much for authors, I could do no better than to speak of their product — the book. And in these halls founded on Jefferson's library, I could find no more fitting text than the third president's simple statement "I could not live without books." For one of history's supremely civilized men, it could not have been otherwise, for books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilization would have been impossible. They are engines of change, windows on the world, and (as a poet has said) "lighthouses erected in the sea of time." They are companions, teachers, magicians, bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are humanity in print. "All the glory of the world would be buried in oblivion," wrote Bishop Richard de Bury, chancellor of England in the fourteenth century, "unless God had provided mortals with the remedy of books."

That seems to me to have rather overlooked another participant: the author. However, Bury may be forgiven this oversight because his *Philobiblon*, written about 1345, before the invention of printing, was one of the earliest and greatest celebrations of the book. If he thought its origin divine, he could cite as authority the opening line of the Gospel according to John: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God." While biblical exegetists cannot agree what this means, John's strange statement had a sacred character in the Middle Ages when its first words, *In principio*, used as a greeting, were regarded

as a charm against evil. Whatever the phrase means, it clearly gives precedence to the word, of which books have since become the embodiment.

Whether history or literature can claim the earliest book that we know of is arguable. It is a Chaldean story of the Flood inscribed on a clay tablet in about 4000 B.C., thus antedating Genesis by some two thousand years. The next survivor is Egypt's Book of the Dead, of which the earliest version dates from about 3600 B.C. For many centuries thereafter, copies of the Book of the Dead, written on papyrus by priests or scribes, were placed in tombs to serve as safe-conduct for the soul on its journey through the afterworld. As such, I suppose, the Book of the Dead could be classified in the how-to category, still a very popular one in our time. Judging from the inscription, "Hospital of the Soul," engraved over the entrance to the book-room of Rameses II, circa 1350 B.C., spiritual therapy remained a primary purpose of Egypt's written word.

Among the Jews, as we know from Ecclesiastes, "of the making of many books there is no end." Books containing the name of God, which meant practically everything both in and outside the biblical canon, were not allowed by Jewish law to be discarded or destroyed. Worn-out scrolls (and in later times volumes) were buried in the Genizah or book cemetery laid under the foundation stone, or in the attics and cupboards of synagogues. When these were full, burial took place in the ordinary cemeteries, sometimes to the accompaniment of music and dancing in festive rather than funereal celebrations. When still in use, the scrolls were kept in chests or earthenware jars. Since books were regarded as true wealth, it was a recognized charity to lend them. In times of war or persecution and forced conversion, the Jews hid their books in tombs and caves like those at Qumram where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Rabbis determined the preparation of writing materials from papyrus and skins and of ink made from lampblack mixed with various gums and resins. In the Book of Numbers it is told that the ink used to inscribe curses against a woman suspected of adultery was afterward dissolved in water and given to the suspect to drink. This was how-to in a rather direct form.

Books as records documenting irrigation, agriculture, astrol-

ogy, trade, and war survive from the Assyrian kingdom of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal of 750-650 B.C. Religion and literature were also represented in psalms, prayers, and narratives of the Gods. Incised with a pointed iron rod or stylus on clay tablets, the Assyrian books ranged in size from nine by six inches down to miniatures of an inch square whose characters could only be read with a magnifying glass. Glass lenses were in fact found in the ruined palaces of Babylon and Nineveh.

Meanwhile, Homer had burst upon the Aegean world and from that spring Western literature begins its flow. In the age of Homer, books consisted of sheets made from the papyrus plant glued together to form a roll sometimes twenty to forty feet long, fastened to a wooden roller. The whole of the *Odyssey*, according to Herodotus, was on one such roller. For convenience, the rolls were later divided into sections of prescribed length and stored in jars, until they gave way to the codex or bound volume which could be kept on a shelf. The Greeks assembled large libraries at Ephesus and Pergamum, in what is now Turkey, and of course at Alexandria under the Ptolemies, Alexander's successors as the rulers of Egypt. Books represented prestige if one may judge from Ptolemy Epiphanes who, being jealous of the library at Pergamum, embargoed the export of papyrus in about 190 B.C. with the result that Pergamum developed parchment, an improved form of dressed sheep or calf skin which took its name from the city. When, 150 years later, Mark Antony presented Cleopatra with the library of Pergamum as, presumably, the then equivalent of a diamond necklace, it contained, according to Plutarch, the startling figure of 200,000 volumes.

At about this time, the Chinese invented paper made from a mixture of bark and hemp, and about a hundred years later, in the first century A.D., invented printing from wooden blocks. One cannot help speculating what might have been the effect on Western culture if block printing had replaced the laborious hand copying of manuscripts in Europe as early as the first century A.D. A millenium passed before the Chinese made the leap to movable type in about 1100 A.D., 350 years before Gutenberg. They fashioned the type first of clay, later of porcelain, copper, and lead.

In Europe, two developments of the thirteenth century — paper and eyeglasses — gave reading a momentous boost.

Hitherto, for most people, acquaintance with literature was gained through listening. The manufacture of paper from rag pulp or a mixture of flax and hemp, by facilitating multiple copies, greatly extended the spread of a given work, while eyeglasses, perhaps even more importantly, extended the years in which a reader could become acquainted with books and a scholar could study. When one stops to consider what life would be like without the ability to read after age forty or thereabouts, and the consequences for the life of the mind in general, eyeglasses suddenly appear as important as the wheel.

Given the labor, skill, and cost of materials involved in handwritten and illuminated manuscripts, the physical book was a precious possession. A ninth-century monk exhorts readers to "turn the pages gently, wash your hands, hold the book just so, and place something between it and your gown" — which incidentally suggests, as I have often suspected, that medieval clothes suffered from a paucity of washing and must have been normally grease stained.

It is astonishing how wide a distribution certain books achieved in the age of manuscript. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, so-called, a celebrated hoax whose author was in fact a physician of Liège named Jean de Bourgogne, attained a rapid and amazing popularity. Written about 1360 and immediately translated from French into English, Latin, Italian, and other languages, it was copied in innumerable editions, of which no less than 225 manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries survive. For books like this of popular information, for encyclopedias, romances, the classics, and the church fathers, professional scribes were kept busy filling the demands of rich patrons, universities, clergy, and booksellers. Cosimo de Medici employed forty-five copyists who turned out 200 volumes in twenty-two months. His contemporary Federigo the Younger, duke of Urbino, employed thirty to forty copyists for fourteen years, and although he lived to see the printing press, his library, according to his biographer, contained "not a single printed book; he would have been ashamed to have one."

In the post-Gutenberg world, books naturally achieved a much wider audience than before and reigned as the mind's main source of pleasure, knowledge, and information for the next four

hundred and fifty years, until the advent of an easier alternative, namely, of radio in 1921 and TV, which came into public use about 1948. As the conveyor of nonvolitional materials to a passive consumer, that is, of material not self-selected and received without active participation, the airwaves rather than the printing press mark the greatest change since the invention of the alphabet. Before reaching that historical divide, I should like for the moment to consider books as a unified subject from Homer to the twentieth century, without shifting gears at Gutenberg.

During this period were written the books that have become permanent possessions of the Western mind, beginning with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Old and New Testaments, the Greek tragedies, the works of Plato and Aristotle, Herodotus and Thucydides, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Macchiavelli's *Prince*, More's *Utopia*, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Shakespeare's plays, Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, Gibbon's *Rome*, Boswell's *Dr. Johnson*. I am being selective, not comprehensive, and I have no intention of inflicting on you another of the conventional five-foot lists on which — great books being what they are — the same titles tend to reappear.

Yet to recognize the place of books in our race memory, one must include the characters whom we are born knowing, so to speak; whom the great writers have created as the personification of a concept or an aspect of mankind, or simply as the focus of an immortal story. Among them are Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver, Candide, Becky Sharp, Madame Bovary, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Alice in Wonderland, Sherlock Holmes. Each has become part of our bloodstream, at any rate for those of us on the fortunate side of thirty; I do not know who today peoples the minds of the young.

Each of us can fill the remaining shelves with his or her own nominees; I with Jane Austen, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, *Treasure Island*, *The Three Musketeers*, *The Just So Stories*, and for perfection of language, *The Importance of Being Ernest* — but to play this game is to take unfair advantage of being up here as speaker. My tastes will not be yours, nor yours your neighbor's. Henry James could not finish *Crime and Punishment* while Robert

Louis Stevenson thought it the best book he had read in ten years. Coleridge thought Gibbon "detestable," whereas Adam Smith thought *The Decline and Fall* a classic that put Gibbon first among writers of his time. Charles Lamb could read neither Gibbon nor Josephus, which I find odd because although I too cannot read Josephus, I am a Gibbon enthusiast. Emerson said Shelley was "never a poet." Edward FitzGerald was bored by Browning, not to mention Mrs. Browning, and could not relish George Eliot at all. For this he would be snubbed by the literary arbiters of today who have suddenly elevated *Middlemarch* as the absolute benchmark of educated taste. I have to confess that I find it a female *Moby Dick*, one of those mysterious books that critics admire and few readers can push their way through. Melville's epic may collect the critical hosannas, but as Harold Ross once remarked, many of us, if put to it, could not quickly say whether Moby Dick is the captain or the whale.

By no coincidence, the great works were written in an age of passion for books, when people read with emotion, devotion, and insatiable appetite. A learned German in an eighteenth-century spa had his Homer printed on rubber so that he could read in the bath. Books moved readers in their deepest feelings, and sometimes to action that altered history. Reading was regarded by its true devotees as a human need as basic as food or love. A book, after all, was required underneath that famous bough, along with bread, wine, and the beloved, to make a paradise of the wilderness.

Learning to read was formerly less of a problem than it is today when the difficulties of teaching it are owed, I suspect, to the existence of that easier alternative. Formerly reading was learned rather than taught, and the precocity was startling. We all know about the prodigious infancy of John Stuart Mill, but he was not unique. Swift was reading the Bible, and Dr. Johnson the *Book of Common Prayer* before each was three. Byron read constantly from the age of five, and from the moment he could read, his grand passion, I am happy to say, was history. The most voracious and omnivorous of all was Macaulay, who too began at three, lying on a rug before the fire, reading while eating bread and butter, and afterward expounding to his nurse what he had read. As he grew he read at all hours, sitting, standing, and walking, climbing a

gate, crossing a street, Greek and Latin equally with English and modern languages, consuming mountains of volumes, and dying in his library with a book open on his lap. By the time they were seven, the early beginners had absorbed incredible kinds and quantities of books, besides reading aloud and reciting from memory reams of poetry, and imbibing in the process the sounds and construction and beauties of their native language. This was what made writers and is one reason why, now that memorizing and reciting have been more or less abandoned, command of prose structure is so feeble today.

Our forefathers in colonial America, if too busy conquering a continent to produce creative writers, were eager readers of the classics, the latest verse and novels from England, and political philosophers from the Continent. "To read the Latin and Greek authors in the original," said Jefferson, "is a sublime luxury," nor was it his alone. The Virginia planter William Byrd added Hebrew and on rising customarily read one or another of the ancient authors in the original before prayers. Colonial Charleston, Williamsburg, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston all had booksellers and, beginning in the 1740s, circulating libraries. Boston's first of its kind was established in 1756 with twelve hundred volumes of history, travel, biography, drama, fiction, poetry, law, and the useful arts. Its founder, a bookseller named John Mein, advertised it as designed to "amuse the man of leisure, to afford an elegant and agreeable relaxation to the minds of men of business, and to insinuate knowledge and instruction under the veil of entertainment to the fair sex." Was it Mr. Mein's secret object, one wonders, to insinuate knowledge in ladies' minds without their knowing it, or to offer them a way of acquiring knowledge without showing it?

Then as now—and perhaps more then than now—books had the power to transport a reader to another time and place, and certain books could so deeply involve him that he felt himself engaged in their events. Richardson's *Pamela*, rather inexactly called the first English novel, was one of these. Published in 1740, its tale of seduction resisted and villainy thwarted by innocence absorbed virtually everyone who could read, in America and France no less than in England. In one village where the inhabitants listened to the local blacksmith read it aloud day by day, their

interest in the heroine's defense of her virtue became so intense that work was neglected, village business came to a standstill, the smith was kept reading till light faded, and, when at last Pamela won through to marriage, the auditors in their excitement rushed in a body to the church to ring a peal of wedding bells.

Historic power lies in the book that by the force of its ideas moves men to action or so alters the climate of thought as to become itself a factor of history. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, opening the gate from the old regime into the modern world of political democracy and ultimately creating the American Constitution, was such a factor. Not long afterward, Rousseau's *Social Contract* combined with his *Confessions* and *Emile* proved among the most influential works ever written for the development of the modern mind, even if the author, as I think, was a stinker. In that succession, the eloquence and thrust of Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, published in 1776, "is working," said George Washington, "a powerful change in the minds of men." Selling an estimated 150,000 copies in its first year, the equivalent of eight million today, it convinced the doubtful of the logic of independence and persuaded many to take up their muskets.

Equaling if not surpassing Paine in public effect, the most influential book ever written by an American was the work of a woman who had previously written only domestic sketches for magazines. Published in 1852 in two little black cloth volumes with a cabin stamped in gold on the cover, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold out its first edition of 5,000 in a week, 100,000 before Christmas, 500,000 in five years, and eventually by the end of the century, a total, including European sales, of 6.5 million, the largest number of readers ever reached by an American book before the mass circulation of paperbacks in our time. Mrs. Stowe's husband gave it to a congressman who was departing by train for Washington. Enthralled from the first word, he became embarrassed as he read on by the attention he was exciting among other passengers because of the tears he could not restrain. Leaving the train at Springfield, he took a room in a hotel and sat up most of the night, reading and weeping as much as he wished.

Emotionalism may account for the book's initial effect but beneath some of the most egregious mid-Victorian molasses ever

committed to writing in all seriousness and sincerity, there were ideas and a genuine passion, and it is these that account for the depth of its influence and for Lincoln's acknowledgment, even if facetious: "So this is the little lady who made this big war." Without the passion that kept Mrs. Stowe writing at her kitchen table after a day's caring for her five children, the passages on the saintliness of Little Eva, the ineffable goodness of the Quakers who shelter Eliza and George, and the devotion of Uncle Tom to his Bible would have become intolerable within ten years. It is an author's passion, whatever its form, whether embodied in Mrs. Stowe's molasses, or Swift's satire, or Poe's lurid imagination, that makes a pulse beat in the printed page and keeps a book alive through its readers long after the writer is dust.

As readership widened in the nineteenth century, the pleasure that books gave evoked a gratitude from readers amounting in some cases almost to worship of a particular author. Walter Scott was an object of this mass admiration, though not on the whole that of the more highbrow among his fellow writers. Coleridge found him passionless, able to amuse without requiring any effort of thought; to narrate with more vivacity and effect than anyone else but not "to create characters that move us deeply." True enough. There are some books that require the reader to reach, to stand on tiptoe, as it were, to read them. There are others that do not necessarily have to make one think to be worth reading and enjoyable. Scott's were unquestionably both, for their story, their vivid scenes, and their reconstruction of history as a living past. They pleased all ranks and classes of men, acknowledged Thomas Love Peacock. When each new Waverley novel appeared, he wrote, "the scholar lays aside his Plato, the statesman suspends his calculations, the young lady deserts her [embroidery] hoop, the critic smiles as he trims his lamp, and the weary artisan resigns his sleep for the refreshment of the magic page." What writer could ask for more? "The refreshment of the magic page" condenses in six words all that I am talking about; it should be the motto carved over some appropriate doorway of this building.

The Waverley magic brought Scott crowds and ovations when he traveled and streams of visiting admirers from royalty down when he stayed home. On his death in 1832, public subscriptions were raised in England, Scotland, and the United

States, not merely for statues and memorials but to pay his debts and preserve the home he had built at Abbotsford that had been so intense a part of his life. The same kind of personal devotion was felt for Jane Porter, whose *Scottish Chiefs* captured the reading public, though denounced as "rubbish" (which it was not) by the literary potentate George Saintsbury. In 1842, more than thirty years after it was first published, an American committee sent to Miss Porter in Edinburgh "an elegant carved armchair trimmed in crimson plush" to express the "admiring gratitude of the American people." Her book was still being read some eighty years later by, among others, myself at age ten or twelve in the edition with the N. C. Wyeth illustrations. In the death of Wallace, *Scottish Chiefs* introduced me to tragedy and accomplished that fusion of reader and subject, regardless of sex, age, and seven hundred years' distance, so that I went to my first costume party in kilt and black velvet tam, a rather incongruous Wallace among the Cinderellas and Snow Whites.

Dickens succeeded to Scott's crown, though faring no better among the critics, who found much to admire and more to excite distaste. He was more successful than any other novelist who ever lived, declared Sir Leslie Stephen, "in hitting off the precise tone of thought and feeling that would find favor among the grocers." This appropriate sneer by the father of Virginia Woolf disapproves for the wrong reason: the more grocers—presumably middle-class lowbrows — who read the better. The real flaw in Dickens is that for all his creative genius in story and character, he is a sloppy writer; for style I would rather read Somerset Maugham, who can at least handle the English language. And for slush, Dickens could equal Mrs. Stowe.

The public adored Dickens's novels and transferred their adoration to his person. He was cheered in the streets on his first visit to America, trailed by multitudes, entertained at splendid balls and banquets, visited by committees bearing gifts, and greeted when he went to the theater by the whole audience rising to its feet. For almost thirty years, each of his sixteen successive books was the best-seller of its day, and when he died in 1870 the general grief, according to one journal, was greater than "if half the monarchs of Europe had been smitten down.... He was so old a friend, so dear a friend," it continued, forgetting Dickens's

animosity toward America and remembering only his work. "There is no living man who in the last thirty years has given such cheer and joy to so many millions." That was what books could do, and why authors were loved.

Surprisingly to us who are nearer to him, the crown passed to Kipling, who, at the height of his popularity, was said by William Dean Howells to be "at this moment possibly the most famous man in the world." When he fell critically ill with pneumonia in New York in 1899, bulletins were issued from his bedside to calm the public, and when he recovered the rejoicing was worldwide. An entire Kipling issue was published by an American journal whose readers were reminded that they had just passed through ten days of anxiety and suspense in which they were threatened "by the greatest calamity that could fall upon English literature."

For some reason not clear to me, comments about Kipling tend to extremism. I have never understood the animosity of some critics toward him, for at his best, apart from lapses, he was a brilliant writer. "It is odd, this hostility to Kipling," writes P. G. Wodehouse. "How the intelligentsia seem to loathe him, and how we of the canaille revel in this stuff." I suppose the reason is that the canaille love Kipling for his dingdong ballads and the intelligentsia hate him for his attitudes. Yet a puzzle remains: if the highbrows can stomach, indeed admire, Ezra Pound, who was a fascist and technically a traitor, why do they foam at Kipling because he was an imperialist, a perfectly normal thing to be in his time and place? Was Jefferson a "racist" because he owned slaves or King Solomon a "sexist" because he had a harem? These labels represent attitudes of *our* time, and it is quite absurd, not to say unhistorical, to apply them retroactively, especially as a form of literary criticism.

Adulation for Kipling in his own time was also extreme. "Is it too much to say," rather wildly asked an American journal called the *New Voice*, "that in his hands more than in the hands of any other one man, lies the destiny of the world for the next quarter century?" It certainly seems like too much, and what this writer could have had in mind is hard to fathom. Nevertheless, extravagant as the comment may be, the fact of an author being accorded such hyperbole is at least a measure of the influence believed to lie in books.

Book-burning is an opposite testimony to the same phenomenon. When the Nazis or any other authoritarian group makes bonfires of books, it is because they fear them as an alternative voice — a voice not necessarily of dissent but of *difference*, which is dangerous to the single-minded. Because the book is written by an individual—and only so long as it continues to be so written — because it is conceived by a single mind and single volition, it will always be different in some way from received doctrine and will always remain the voice of the individual, which, as I see it, is the voice of freedom.

Of course, as we all know, books can be trash, and the public goes for trash as well as for quality. The odd thing is that it goes for both indiscriminately, as is vividly presented in *Golden Multitudes*, a record of best-sellers compiled by Frank Luther Mott on the basis of sales estimated by him to have reached one percent of the population in the decade in which a given book was published. The authors who dominated the ninteenth century before the copyright law, each with four or more books fulfilling Mott's criterion, were successively Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Dickens, and Thackeray, Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Mark Twain, and Kipling. Robert Louis Stevenson and Conan Doyle reached the mark with three each; Bulwer-Lytton, Victor Hugo, Dumas père, Poe, Eugene Sue, Hawthorne, Louisa Alcott, Jules Verne, Marie Corelli, H. Rider Haggard, and J. M. Barrie reached it with two each. Of this group, it is notable that most of them are still read today. All benefited in their time from very enterprising pirate publishers who often had reprints on sale in the streets within a few days of the arrival of the original. Pages were divided among printers, run off overnight, assembled, cheaply bound, and ready for distribution in as little, in some cases, as forty-eight hours.

After the copyright law closed down the pirates in 1891, public taste, I regret to report, took a sudden and noticeable slide. Since the law could not have operated selectively against quality, the decline in taste was, I hope, a coincidence reflecting some other aspect of the time, perhaps increased population and spreading literacy. In a complete shift from Europe, the new champions of the first two decades of the twentieth century were all American, and not good American. Gene Stratton Porter, who wrote wonder-girl adventures, and Harold Bell Wright, who wrote Chris-

tian Westerns, hit the highest mark with five books each, accompanied, in varying degrees, by Zane Grey, Edgar Guest, Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks*, Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*, *Pollyanna*, by Eleanor H. Porter, and *The Sheik*, by Ethel M. Hull: in other words, a blanket of mush with a heavy mixture of the spurious exotic. Short of a sociological study of the taste, manners, economics, and demographic statistics of the era, which I have not ventured upon, I find it hard to explain this sudden and striking change from the reading taste of the previous era, unless it be that there are always several reading publics and that a lower one was coming up. One must also remember that the topmost sellers by no means represent a unity of taste: mush was also read in the ninteenth century and honest literature read and appreciated in the twentieth. Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, a truly superb novel, was a best-seller for two years running in 1905-6, just preceding the even greater enthusiasm for *Three Weeks*.

With the invention of book clubs in the 1920s and of modern paperbacks with glazed colored covers in the 1930s, trends fly off in all directions. Beginning with Dale Carnegie on *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, how-tos take the lead, with Dr. Spock's total of 23 million copies ultimately the winner by many lengths. He is followed by a galloping herd of cookbooks interspersed with Kahlil Gibran and multiples of Erle Stanley Gardner and Dr. Seuss, the children's equivalent. Towering among these is the solitary miracle of *Gone with the Wind*, and not far behind appear *The Good Earth*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, James Hilton and Erskine Caldwell with several books each, and Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and John O'Hara with only one each. Then comes World War II followed by our present era of sex, slaughter, and slop, otherwise *Peyton Place*, *The Godfather*, Jacqueline Susann, Micky Spillane, Ian Fleming, *Love Story*, and that feathered born-again Christian, *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*. Unexpectedly in this company appears *To Kill a Mockingbird*, doubtless reflecting national attention focused on desegregation and the South. Next march the heavy males—Wouk and Michener—and what I think of as the Irwin phalanx—that is to say, Irwin Shaw, Irving Stone, Irving Wallace, and Leon Uris—

along with occasional sports like *Catcher in the Rye* and Orwell's *1984*. Literary types who break into the upper sales levels with one book apiece are not there for literary reasons. In the case of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley*, Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, Updike's *Couples*, the reason is content: sex or war. But what categories fit the equal popularity of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Doctor Zhivago*? One appealed, I imagine, for its own sake, the other because of the film.

What is one to make of all this? When, nurtured by movie versions, the vulgarest like *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist* sell the most, are we then, as the Cassandras claim, sinking into a slough of mass culture in which trash will eventually drive out literature? This is not a new fear. When the printing press was invented, Lorenzo di Medici's librarian foresaw a fearsome decline: "You will put a hundred evil volumes into a thousand clumsy hands," he warned, "and madmen will be loosed upon the world." What he evidently feared was demagoguery arousing the populace, whereas the specter today is vulgarization reducing all values in art to the level of the most popular. The unworried will say that the lover of literature is free to make his own choice; no one is forced to read trash or watch it on TV. But the question arises whether we will have anything worthwhile to choose from in a society conditioned by mass entertainment.

I am not among the worriers, or perhaps only, let us say, for two days a week. The rest of the time I believe that quality always bubbles up somewhere, that true writers will always be born and will create, even if the contemporary welcome is discouraging. Certainly in literature and art we are going through a shoddy period, and twice a week I cannot help worrying that the rewards in money and celebrity of following the pop fads must inevitably corrupt the craftsman, as indeed they already have — but then they always did. History has taught me that pessimism about one's own period is perennial; that people have always seen decadence lapping at their feet and have yearned for a golden past, just as the inhabitants of that past condemned their times and themselves looked back in nostalgia to still older values.

Today, as ever, the priests of literature continue the theme that Dickens — or his current equivalent — is for grocers. They

have staked out a high culture and a mass culture, bridged for the convenience of Dwight MacDonald by a midculture whereon to exercise the brilliant swordplay of his invective. But, in fact, the levels mingle, the divisions are fluid. I do not know on just which level the arbiters would place Gibbon, but if their criterion for greatness is appreciation by only the most refined minds the immediate success of the *Decline and Fall* would render it suspect. "My book is on every table!" reported Gibbon gleefully when the first volume came out in 1776. Though priced at a guinea, it sold, his publishers told him, like a three-penny pamphlet and was sold out in a fortnight. "I am enjoying the compliments of women of fashion," wrote the happy author, "for I have had the good fortune to please these creatures." That a book could both please these creatures and be one of the major works of our culture is hard for the critics to swallow.

The eighteenth-century reading public was doubtless better educated than today's, but public taste in any time is an uncertain standard because it is not a monolith. Some people like slop and some like—and recognize—literature. Today, despite our worship of egalitarianism, vox pop is not vox dei. A best-seller is not ipso facto a good book, but neither is it, as the highbrows would have you believe, *necessarily* trash because the populace embraces it. *Pilgrim's Progress*, a popular favorite and prototype of mid—not to say mass—culture from the start, endured to become, despite the disparagement of Joseph Addison and some others, the most widely read book in English after the Bible. When the educated minority differs from the common people in opinion of a book, according to Macaulay, the former usually prevails, but Bunyan's book, he pointed out, was a rare case of the reverse. On the tercentenary of Bunyan's birth in 1928, the New York Public Library exhibited 500 editions from its own collection, including translations into forty languages. This may not make *Pilgrim's Progress* literature in the eyes of, let us say, F. R. Leavis or the late Edmund Wilson, but it does make it a classic. A book that has carried genuine meaning to large numbers of readers over three centuries has validity, which is what counts.

High culture's guardians, nevertheless, protect their turf as exclusively as if it were Tuxedo Park—and with much the same result: few may enter and the society inside is dull. In the high

culture park one is hardly allowed to read anything but T. S. Eliot and Henry James, with perhaps a peep into Proust. In history, Vico has the most chic because no one can explain what he meant; one is also permitted a purge of Hannah Arendt. The park contains not much scope for reading for pleasure.

One cannot help feeling that its guardians sometimes miss the point of literature, which is not to cut gems of flashing and exquisite rarity but to communicate, to convey a meaning, an art, a story, a fantasy, even a mystery, *to* someone. The writer must have a reader as the yin must have a yang. Literature does not exist in a vacuum; indeed, if it is not read, like music without listeners, it cannot be said to exist at all. Yet the high priests today appear to find merit in proportion to impenetrability. In a recent questionnaire by the *New York Times Book Review*, asking critics their nominees of books published since World War II which could join the company of the one hundred or so most important books of Western literature, esoterica seemed to be the criterion of many of the replies. Samuel Beckett won the most mentions and while I liked *Waiting for Godot* myself, I would not quite put it up there with the *Iliad* or *King Lear*. Among other choices were the following (and if you find them incredible, you may check for yourselves in the issue of June 3, 1979): Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, John Wheelwright's *Collected Poems* and—here is a real sleeper—*Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah* by Gershom Scholem. Are these answers *serious*? This kind of pretentious nonsense only confirms one in the belief that literature can exist without critics, if not without readers.

Books are made for pleasure and knowledge (and, of course, in large numbers for information, but that is an extraneous category). "A desire for knowledge," pronounced Dr. Johnson, "is the natural feeling of mankind." Readers will seek it and may even acquire it subliminally in the despised territory of mass culture. I suppose it is not impossible that the readers of *Love Story* or *Seagull* may have learned *something*, if only about Harvard or air currents. If Dr. Johnson is right, they will move on.

I have now bumped into the present, where I cannot avoid the question that dominates all these discussions — of books versus the airwaves. My qualifications in this area are meager because I

most enjoyed the airwaves some twenty-five years ago when our family listened to Fred Allen and Senator Claghorn and Mrs. Nussbaum while driving—or crawling—home through Sunday evening traffic from weekends in the country. The next best show in my experience was the Watergate hearings under Senator Ervin, who shines as the unsurpassed star of whatever TV I have watched, admittedly not very much. From this narrow base, I will venture two not very original observations, one concerned with mediocrity, the other with free speech.

The essential nature of commercial TV is that its program is designed not for self-expression but to sell something other than itself to the greatest number of viewers. Even public broadcasting has its discreet corporate sponsors whose purpose is to make you see Mobil or Weyerhauser or whatever as Santa Claus, otherwise known as "goodwill." Government subsidy, similarly motivated, produces "The Adams Chronicles," evidently designed for an eighth-grade textbook that might be followed by "novelization." Now books, being self-selected by the consumer, can keep pace with his growing maturity in age and taste, whereas the media on the whole must remain at a level that its programmers believe palatable to the widest possible audience. Exceptions of excellence shine here and there, but the general fare is popcorn. Books too may be aimed at a mass audience and they too can be false, mediocre, or vacuous, but there will always be a good proportion and an infinite variety at the tiptoe level.

Secondly, books by their heterogeneity can never represent a managed culture, whereas the airwaves by their nature and control by licensing might. That is their problem, however, and a political one which is not our subject tonight. The book remains the carrier of civilization, the voice of the individual, the "refreshment of the magic page."

COLOPHON

The Book, *by Barbara W. Tuchman, has been printed in an edition of 4,000 copies. The woodcut initial* B *on the cover was drawn and cut by Fritz Kredel (1900-1973). The cover type, Trajanus, was designed in 1940 by the distinguished graphic designer, type designer, and author Warren Chappell.*

The cover was printed from a zinc photoengraving produced by the Sun Crown Company of Washington, D. C., and foundry type cast by the Stempel Foundry, Frankfurt am Main, West Germany. It was printed letterpress by the Acorn Press in Rockville, Md., on Strathmore Paper Company Grandee Duplex.

On the title page, Old Face Open type, which was originally shown in Fry's specimen sheet in 1788, is used for the title. It was cast by Stephenson Blake in Sheffield, England. The highly refined Trump Medieval type used for the text, created in 1954 by the versatile German type designer Georg Trump, was cast by the Weber Foundry in Stuttgart, Germany. Its roman letters are classic in origin, but the italic lowercase exhibits a remarkable contemporary quality.

The text was printed by offset lithography at Stephenson, Incorporated, of Washington, D. C., after it was set on a Mergenthaler VIP machine at General Typographers, Washington, D. C. The paper, Sunray Vellum, was manufactured by the Hopper Paper Company. Folding and binding were executed at Stephenson, Incorporated.

Design of The Book *is by John Michael.*